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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this document is to widen the conversation and include all the stakeholders in the further development and use of enlightened and relevant research on middle level schooling. The research agenda it presents is meant to be a guide to topics, themes, and questions central to a number of middle level issues. The agenda consists of sets of questions, more than 200 in all, that are far-reaching yet incomplete in nature and format. These questions are grouped into 12 categories based on the position paper of the National Middle School Association "This We Believe" (1982, 1995). These categories are: (1) "Educators Committed to Young Adolescents"; (2) "A Shared Vision"; (3) "High Expectations for All"; (4) "An Adult Advocate for Every Student"; (5) "Family and Community Partnerships"; (6) "A Positive School Climate"; (7) "Curriculum That Is Challenging, Integrative and Exploratory"; (8) "Varied Teaching and Learning Approaches"; (9) "Assessment and Evaluation That Promote Learning"; (10) "Flexible Organizational Structures"; (11) "Programs and Policies That Foster Health, Wellness, and Safety"; and (12) "Comprehensive Guidance and Support Systems." (SLD)

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A 21st Century Research Agenda

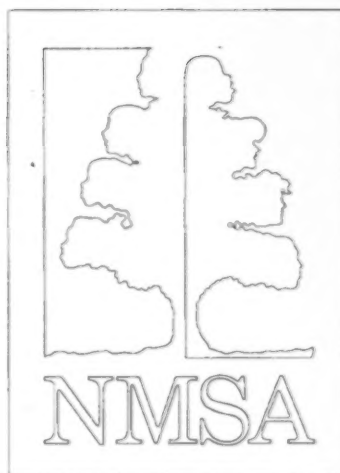
*Issues, Topics & Questions
Guiding Inquiry Into
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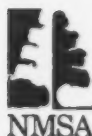
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Middle Level Theory & Practice*



National Middle School Association



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National Middle School Association (NMSA) is a non-profit organization devoted solely to improving the education and development of young adolescents — those between the ages of 10-15. For information on NMSA and its many services, call 1-800-528-NMSA.

*NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION IS DEDICATED
TO IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG
ADOLESCENTS BY PROVIDING VISION, KNOWLEDGE, AND
RESOURCES TO ALL WHO SERVE THEM IN ORDER TO
DEVELOP HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE, AND ETHICAL CITIZENS.*

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INTRODUCTION

This document, *A 21st Century Research Agenda*, is an important contribution to National Middle School Association's (NMSA) ongoing commitment to the implementation of quality middle level education for all young adolescents. It is the result of two years of work initiated by a "Blue Ribbon" Research Agenda Task Force and supported by the association's Research Committee. A wide variety of interested researchers and middle level practitioners also made contributions in finalizing the document.

When the Research Agenda Task Force was convened it was asked to formulate a research agenda which addressed the effectiveness of middle level curriculum and practices. NMSA anticipated that the content of the research agenda would contain the following:

1. Recommended areas of research with examples of general questions that might be addressed in each area.
2. Recommended ways the research agenda could be continually developed and utilized.

From the onset of this project, NMSA recognized that it was important to explore varied research issues to help examine and, where appropriate, modify commonly held beliefs in the field of middle level education. It was our intent to develop and promote a middle level research agenda that would foster awareness, describe situations, clarify and define concepts and issues, extend current knowledge, test assumptions, and contribute to understandings of how research is translated into practice in middle level classrooms.

We believe this document addresses these expectations and can serve as a catalyst for furthering middle level research. We also recognize that it is a *work in progress* and we are committed to its continual growth and refinement. NMSA has supported and will continue to support the Research Agenda in the following ways:

- Encourage networking among members at all levels of education regarding middle level research and its impact on educating young adolescents in ways that are developmentally responsive, academically challenging, and socially equitable.
- Encourage and facilitate, when possible, collaborative projects among researchers and practitioners.
- Develop Research Summaries available to members and others through our Membership/Information Services.
- Publish *Research in Middle Level Education Quarterly*.
- Publish pertinent books, e.g. *What Current Research Says to the Middle Level Practitioner*, when appropriate.
- Develop a research strand of concurrent and assembly sessions at the Annual Conference.
- Publish a research column in *Middle School Journal*.
- Continue to support the work of NMSA's Research Committee.

We hope you will join us in our commitment to address the important research issues facing middle level education in such a way that the results of this work will have a meaningful impact on the policies and practices of educating 10 to 15 year olds. The young adolescents with whom we work and live on a daily basis deserve our best efforts if each is to have the chance to become all he or she can and should be.

Sue Swaim
NMSA Executive Director

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The Emergence of Middle Level Education

The development of middle level education during the past three decades has been steady and sure. In the early 1970s, middle level education emerged as a distinct educational entity as middle grade programs were instituted in hundreds of school districts. Often, middle level education goals grew out of the personal experiences of teachers and administrators pursuing their instincts, addressing mismatches in actual practice, and enlarging their vision when students responded positively or negatively. Gains came through empirical evidence and accumulated experience. Additionally, the founding of National Middle School Association (NMSA) in 1973 sparked significant interest in middle level education. Through its conferences, publications, and other initiatives, NMSA has focused attention on the needs, interests and education of young adolescents.

Several significant documents supporting middle level philosophy and enhancing the public's understanding of it have been published. Two of these stand out as pivotal, each adding to an emerging vision of middle level education. A call for appropriate practices in the schooling of young adolescents was first articulated by NMSA in *This We Believe* (1982), its all-time best-selling publication. The Carnegie Corporation's seminal document on middle level education, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989), formulated eight recommendations for transforming middle grade schools:

- Creating a community for learning
- Teaching a core of common knowledge
- Ensuring success for all students
- Empowering teachers and administrators
- Preparing teachers for the middle grades
- Improving academic performance through better health and fitness
- Reengaging families in the education of young adolescents
- Connecting schools with communities

This We Believe and *Turning Points* are both grounded in values and perceptions about the nature and needs of children. They spurred the evolution of middle level education toward greater parity between statements of vision and actual policies and practices. The compelling messages of these two publications led many state education departments in the United States to develop coherent policy objectives for their middle level education programs, spelling out an unambiguous vision for middle school practitioners in those states. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) Report of the U.S. Department of Labor (1991) spoke to the attributes that young people will need in order to succeed in the world of work. Basic skills, thinking skills, personal qualities, and interpersonal skills, all hallmarks of good middle level education, were cited in the SCANS report. Also in 1991, the *NMSA/NCATE-Approved Curriculum Guidelines* for the training of the next generation of middle level teachers were adopted and are now shaping middle

level education programs in many institutions of higher learning.

Informed by more than a decade of developments, NMSA in 1995 reissued its basic position paper, *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*, in all-new copy that further clarified middle level philosophy. The document cited twelve characteristics delineating "a vision of what developmentally responsive middle level schools could be and should be." *This We Believe* asserts that developmentally responsive middle level schools are characterized by:

- Educators committed to young adolescents
- A shared vision
- High expectations for all
- An adult advocate for every student
- Family and community partnerships
- A positive school climate

With these characteristics in place, NMSA believes that a developmentally responsive middle level school will provide the following:

- Curriculum that is challenging, integrative and exploratory
- Varied teaching and learning approaches
- Assessment and evaluation that promote learning
- Flexible organizational structures
- Programs and policies that foster health, wellness and safety
- Comprehensive guidance and support services

When these characteristics are operational, according to *This We Believe*, "[middle level] schools are in the best position to make suitable provisions for an educational program that truly reflects student and societal needs" (p. 10).

Other events provide substantive support for the ongoing development of middle level education. The preliminary findings of a major study established in 1989 at the Center for Prevention Research and Development at the University of Illinois and as an insert in Kappan in 1997, heralded the emergence of empirical research indicating the positive impact of appropriate middle level practices on young adolescents. NMSA's initiation of the Month of the Young Adolescent in 1997 with 30 national organizations and youth-serving agencies as co-sponsors, and the anticipated publication of Carnegie Corporation's *Turning Points II*, speak to the continued interest in and growth of the middle level movement.

Clearly, the education of young people is of vital importance. The growing professionalism of middle level education combined with a broader understanding of developmentally responsive middle level practices will have a positive impact on the education young adolescents receive. Looking back three decades to when man first walked on the moon, one sees a steady evolution and articulation of middle level philosophy, programs,

and practices.

Documents, initiatives, and events such as those noted here indicate that middle level education is very much alive and well. However, one aspect — research — has not yet been fully addressed. For some time there has been a need for substantive discussion among interested parties regarding vigorous and continued research that is based on a thorough and thoughtful research agenda for middle level education. The purpose of this document is to widen the conversation and include all the stakeholders in the further development and utilization of enlightened and relevant middle level research.

The Need for A 21st Century Research Agenda

Since 1910 after the creation of the junior high school, middle level education has sought to improve the quality of education for young adolescents. The interrelationship between academic growth and the personal needs of students has informed the practice of an increasing number of educators. As junior high school organizational structures gave way to the more refined middle school, and as these schools flourished throughout the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, it became obvious that the movement was fueled by the singular belief that developmentally appropriate teaching and learning experiences would benefit young adolescents, both in academics and in affect.

While some might argue that middle level education research has not kept pace with the movement and others might contend that little definitive scientific "proof" has been provided to support middle level educational practices, most researchers would be quick to note the relatively "short shrift" any middle level educational research was given prior to reform efforts spawned in the mid-1980s. In fields such as psychology, anthropology, chemistry and medicine, for example, centuries of incremental research have contributed to the development of more precise research questions. Many of these questions are still being studied today, thus continuing a long-held, well-established, historical foundation of constructs upon which many of those fields still depend.

Middle level education, however, has been building a research foundation for less than three quarters of a century, with more *bona fide* efforts coming only in the last three decades -- since the advent of the middle school. Serendipitously, during this time more sophisticated measurement tools have been developed, enabling researchers to study increasingly larger data sets with greater accuracy.

Even as educational research builds its foundation, middle level theoreticians and practitioners continue to seek answers to questions regarding the effects of program, policy, and pedagogical changes in education. However, such questions can only be answered by thoroughly understanding a complex set of constructs that impact outcomes. Too often a "simple" answer is demanded by a "simple" question, and sometimes the question itself demonstrates a general misunderstanding of an issue.

The most common questions relative to middle level education are not unlike the most common questions now being posed of all reform initiatives: "Does it work and how do you know?" While the direct response in most instances is, "It depends," and while such an answer is intuitive to most educators, many lay persons want a "yes" or "no" answer along with proof. In order to provide a "yes" or "no" response, one must first understand what "it" (i.e., a middle school) is and, second, understand what "works" really means. The former is not a single construct but a complex set of interwoven, interconnected variables; the latter could be a variety of ideals: higher standardized achievement test scores than were evidenced in the past by the same or different student cohort or at present compared to the same or some other cohort; more socially responsible citizens as measured by some scale; improved student self-worth as measured by a highly valid instrument; better problem-

solvers; more highly trained/skilled workers; better adjusted and more tolerant citizens.

Any attempt to understand relationships regarding issues such as these rests on at least two fundamental building blocks: (1) the experimental and control groups chosen for comparisons and (2) methods and types of instruments used to measure outcomes, including the ability to control or account for variances caused by outside influences, known and unknown. Questions and methodologies, then, are central to the "Does it work? How do you know?" debate, and questions are central to the creation of *A 21st Century Research Agenda*.

In order to address in a comprehensive and conscientious manner the variables and constructs associated with middle level education reform, one must first ask the "right questions" and in the "right way." That is, knowing what one wants to find out will guide the nature and methods of inquiry and ultimately lead to more precise questions than were first formulated. This is the nature of research and it supports the need for a *21st Century Research Agenda*.

There are several factors driving the need for NMSA to develop a research agenda. Among these are NMSA's call for reform validation, recent improvement in methods of inquiry, refinement of questions guiding inquiry, and a need to clarify a fundamental issue: an understanding of what is meant by the term "middle school." Leadership provided by NMSA has helped initiate this dialogue. While many educators harbor notions built upon conventional wisdom regarding the meaning of "middle school," no common, agreed-upon definition exists. Given the seemingly endless possibilities and variables, research guided by an agenda should help us understand more comprehensively the nature and implications for learning that a middle school construct affords.

The Purpose of A 21st Century Research Agenda

This research agenda is not prescriptive; rather, it is descriptive. While comprehensive, it is not and cannot be all-inclusive. And as a resource, it is neither seminal nor definitive. *A 21st Century Research Agenda* is a guide — a prototypical template of ideas. It is a beginning for those who would undertake studies to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding young adolescent schooling.

This agenda represents the collective wisdom of middle level researchers, scholars, and practitioners derived from their past and present study and experience. To promote further study and to guide future inquiry, the agenda suggests topics, themes, and questions central to a number of middle level education issues. The more than 200 questions listed herein will necessarily be reshaped, revised, and rewritten over time as new findings lead to more precise, appropriate (i.e., "right") questions.

The agenda consists of sets of questions that are far-reaching, yet incomplete in nature and format. Some are more global, others more limited, but all seek to examine important aspects of middle level education. For each set of questions listed under any given topic or issue, other questions could and should be broached. As these additional questions are raised, the agenda will take on a broader but more tangible shape and lead to even more practical applications.

This agenda is designed to promote an on-going conversation in which subsequent issues, topics, and questions are generated from emerging themes, all of which compel individuals and groups periodically to contribute information reflecting new knowledge and applications. It is intended to be used by researchers to guide inquiry and foster new studies. If enough questions can be answered definitively by these inquiries, structural models can be designed to respond to the question, "Do middle schools work?", or to posit a more precise question, "Which middle level schooling practices contribute to what types of outcomes?" This *21st Century Research Agenda*, then, serves as a catalyst for new studies. Ultimately, it will lead to a better understanding of the effect of middle level education on the lives of young adolescents and the communities in which they live.

The Process of Developing the Research Agenda

Acting upon a recommendation from its Research Committee, NMSA convened a "Blue Ribbon" Research Agenda Task Force in January 1996 to initiate discussions leading toward the development of a comprehensive middle level education research agenda. Task force members included Ross Burkhardt, Robert Felner, David Hough, Judith Irvin, J. Howard Johnston, Joan Lipsitz, Sue Swaim, and Bob Ziegenfuss. This group investigated three fundamental questions:

(1) What is the most pressing middle level education question that needs to be answered? The Task Force had little trouble identifying the chief question posed by those scrutinizing educational reform -- "What is the effect of reform initiatives on student outcomes?" Or, more succinctly, "What is the effect of middle level education reform initiatives on student outcomes, i.e., achievement?" Or, put bluntly, "Do middle schools work?" Because this last question, in its base form, has a tendency to obfuscate rather than illuminate, the Task Force took the logical next step by asking another and more precise question:

(2) What information and data are needed to answer question number one? On this issue, the Task Force agreed that a number of different constructs were needed to provide definitive, reliable results. The research questions needed to be delineated in ways that would direct the design of studies that could contribute accurate and appropriate answers. Clearly, many questions have to be answered before appropriate constructs can be codified. This led to the third question:

(3) How can the necessary information and data be collected? Due to the mammoth undertaking of answering the many questions at hand, the Task Force determined that an international work force of researchers was required. To allow a self-selected network of volunteers to emerge naturally, the Task Force chose to develop sample research questions grouped around issues or themes related to topics. *This We Believe*, NMSA's 1995 position paper, was chosen as the topic organizer. The Task Force agreed that priorities for research in middle level education generally fell into at least one of the twelve characteristics of middle level education cited in that document.

Research Questions

The Task Force drafted an initial set of issues and questions, as well as an action plan, which called for responses from a wide range of contributors. Recognizing that increased input would provide refinement and further shaping of the document, NMSA scheduled a special two-hour Research Agenda working session on November 2, 1996, during its Annual Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. More than 50 middle level scholars and researchers, divided into six work groups, generated the ideas that led to the development of a comprehensive set of research questions.

A draft of the revised questions was then sent for further revision to both NMSA's Research Agenda Task Force and Research Committee. Yet, another draft was circulated in March 1997 to members of the Research in Middle Level Education Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association at its business meeting in Chicago. As educators throughout the United States and other countries contributed to this NMSA initiative, the agenda questions were continually revised. The present document is the most recent draft of research questions generated through this approach.

The questions contained in this agenda reflect the collective wisdom of scholars and

researchers from diverse areas of expertise across geographic, ethnic, gender, and cultural boundaries. Since the development of *A 21st Century Research Agenda* is on-going, amended updates of this agenda will be forthcoming. Critical reflection on middle level philosophy and practices ought to be an ongoing activity and middle level educators need to stand back and examine what they do regularly.

Action Plan — Engage Others

In addition to on-going efforts to develop and refine research questions, the Task Force addressed other action plan items. It was suggested that scholars and researchers outside the sub-specialty of middle level education *per se* be engaged in this effort through the development of an edited series of publications addressing educational reform. Middle level programs, practices, and policies are inescapably built into the larger school reform rubric and are, in many instances, at the forefront of these efforts. Thus, addressing school reform in a more contextual way would lend credence to the belief that middle level education is a developmentally responsive approach rather than a proselytizing effort to win converts. National leaders who have studied school reform from various disciplines and methodological approaches will be asked to contribute their ideas and findings to what would be the collective best-thinking regarding improved teaching and learning at all grade levels.

A Comprehensive Study

Another action plan idea suggested by the Task Force was to undertake a comprehensive, unified study. While research questions and continual dialogue guide middle level hypotheses and study designs, a unified effort addressing student achievement has yet to be completed. A large sample of schools generally provides enough variety among buildings and differences in levels of implementation of the middle school concept, i.e., programs, practices, and policies. Different types of schooling experiences might allow for significant comparisons to be drawn. These differing school experiences could then be used as the bases for judgments regarding student achievement. For the first time in the history of the middle level education movement, a large enough sample of *bona fide* middle schools can be identified, codified, and compared across geographic, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and other descriptive boundaries.

Sponsorship

Before a comprehensive study can be commissioned, a number of building blocks must be in place. Among the most essential are a plan, adequate funding, and a work force large enough to carry out the study. The Task Force recommended that an appointed planning team draft a proposal for submission to prospective funding sources under the sponsorship of NMSA. Once the plan is approved and funded, researchers will be asked to participate in the various phases of data collection, analysis, and reporting. In this way, a comprehensive study could synthesize the existing body of knowledge regarding middle school programs, practices and policies into an effective design that utilized the best talents of highly qualified researchers.

Inform Constituents

Because the results of research should not sit on a shelf and collect dust, the Task Force's final recommendation called for the sponsorship of programs to inform constituents of promising applications discovered through new research. By developing questions, engaging a wide range of scholars and researchers in the dialogue, supporting a comprehensive study, and organizing a mechanism for disseminating the findings through sponsored programs, a definitive middle level research base can be established and continually updated.

Research Issues, Topics, & Questions

Based on the Twelve Characteristics Outlined in

This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools

I. EDUCATORS COMMITTED TO YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

A. EDUCATOR PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT

1. How are institutions of higher learning changing teacher preparation programs to address middle level goals? How should they change teacher preparation programs?
2. How are state certification requirements changing to address middle level goals? What is the impact of these changes on teaching-learning?
3. Are professional development schools producing more effective middle level educators than traditional programs? What is the impact of middle level professional development schools on the schooling of young adolescents?
4. What types of field experiences are impacting pre-service teachers' practices?
5. What is the impact of *NMSA/NCATE-Approved Curriculum Guidelines* on undergraduate and graduate middle level teacher education programs?
6. How are school administrators being prepared to lead and manage middle level initiatives? What types of programs that prepare middle school administrators are most successful, and why?
7. How is adolescent development being taught? By whom?
8. What promising cross-disciplinary approaches are being utilized?
9. What are the effects of state requirements regarding early adolescence for principal certification?
10. What is being done to attract potential educators to middle level teaching?
11. What are common characteristics of effective middle level educators?

B. LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS

1. What strategies do principals use to promote learning communities for adults?
2. What types of parenting/family involvement programs enhance student success in school?
3. What types of school-based programs promote community awareness?
4. What is the impact of varying types of teaching teams on parent — teacher — student — community relationships?
5. What is the impact of advisory programs on parent — teacher — student — community relationships?
6. How does technology facilitate learning among a community of learners?

C. CONTEXTS THAT FACILITATE EFFICACY

1. How does interdisciplinary team organization promote teacher efficacy?
2. What types of professional development enable teachers to be self-directed learners who take responsibility for their learning and the learning of their students?
3. What types of professional development programs impact teaching-learning and in what ways?
4. What is the relationship between teacher efficacy and student learning?
5. What is the relationship between advisory programs and student learning?
6. What is the relationship between teacher "burn-out" and student learning?
7. What types of professional development enable teachers to develop cognitive and conceptual complexity, citizenship and social responsibility, and psychological and social maturity?

D. COMMITMENT TO MIDDLE LEVEL PHILOSOPHY

1. How knowledgeable are teachers regarding middle level philosophy?
2. How does teacher knowledge of the growth and development of young adolescents affect student outcomes in:
 - a. achievement?
 - b. social development?
 - c. physical/mental health?
 - d. personal growth?
 - e. moral development?
 - f. cognitive development?
 - g. other(s)?
3. What types of staff development activities help orient teachers to middle level philosophy? change teachers' beliefs? change teachers' practices? and in which order?

E. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULT/STUDENT INTERACTIONS

1. How does teacher practice in cross-graded, all-school activities (e.g. advisories, drama productions, band, chorus, orchestra, exploratories, intramurals) promote long-term:
 - (a) student/adult relationships?
 - (b) moral development?
 - (c) cognitive development?
 - (d) achievement
 - (e) healthy life-styles?
 - (f) other(s)?

II. A SHARED VISION

A. COMMUNITY-WIDE DEVELOPMENT

1. How does a middle level school develop a shared vision?
2. What are successful models for developing a community-wide shared vision for the education of young adolescents?
3. How does a shared vision impact teaching and learning?
4. How might groups who are not involved and whose voices are not heard become actively involved, valued members of the school community?
5. What is the impact of new state, national, and provincial assessments on the school, the community, students, teaching and teachers, and business interests?

B. PRIORITIES AND AVENUES FOR ACHIEVING ACCEPTED NORMS

1. What are the methodological issues associated with assessment of teacher performances and effectiveness?
2. How does one ensure continued involvement of all stakeholders in shaping and reshaping a middle school vision?
3. How can creating a shared vision become an on-going process?

C. COMMUNICATING VISION

1. How do school leadership teams communicate an on-going vision to incoming students and parents?
2. How do schools ensure that the vision held by stakeholders is articulated?
3. What is the relationship of school vision to student outcomes?

D. DECISION MAKING PROCESSES, STRUCTURES, AND FOCI

1. What decisions about the curriculum do teachers make?
2. What factors influence various types of curricula?
3. What is the impact of various curricula on teaching and learning?
4. How do educators ensure that all stakeholders understand and are able to articulate the common vision through participation in the decision making process?
5. How are students involved in the life of the school and how are they engaged in the decision-making process?

III. HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL

A. CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING, BEHAVIOR, ATTITUDE, AND CREATIVITY ORIGINATING FROM AN UNDERSTANDING OF DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. How do high expectations for student behavior impact student achievement?
2. What student behaviors contribute to high expectations and the achievement of these expectations?
3. What connections exist between teaching and teaming strategies, behaviors, and expectations?
4. What connections exist between principal behavior/policy and high expectations?
5. How are expectations most effectively communicated to the stakeholders?
6. How can educators encourage parents to hold and support high expectations?

B. COMMITMENT TO QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE

1. What strategies do teaching teams use to promote high quality student work?
2. What is the impact of state, provincial, and national standards, and/or curriculum frameworks, and/or assessments on: student achievement? drop-out rates? self-esteem? "burn-out"? other(s)?
3. What is the impact of professional development on teaching?
4. What is the depth and breadth of implementation of middle level education programs, policies, and practices necessary to bring about various levels of change?
5. What is the impact of varying levels of implemented middle school components on student achievement?
6. How are the several components of a middle school systematically related? To what extent does this relationship influence student outcomes and/or achievement?
7. What is the causal relationship between positive affective development and academic achievement in young adolescents?

C. RESPECT AND APPRECIATION FOR DIVERSITY

1. How do teachers provide for cultural differences and varied learning styles?
2. How do teachers define culture?
3. How do learning styles relate to culture?

4. Do teachers who address diversity among cultures maintain high expectations?
5. How are high student expectations defined by students, parents, and teachers? How are those acted-upon definitions evaluated?
6. How do teachers promote high expectations while attending to individual differences?

D. INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT FOR MEETING HIGH LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

1. What support do teachers of low performing students need?
2. How can support for all teachers be achieved?
3. How do schools and communities give teachers information and opportunities to enable them to learn more about their students?
4. How can teachers be supported at different stages in their careers?
5. How can high expectations held by teachers be measured/assessed?
6. What kind of support does a principal need from a school system?

IV. AN ADULT ADVOCATE FOR EVERY STUDENT

A. ADVISORY PROGRAMS

1. What are examples of successful models for advisory programs?
2. What elements of various types of advisory programs best engage students in: learning? affective development?
3. How do/should advisors advocate for young adolescents?
4. What is the nature of positive adult-student relationships in schools? How do teachers and administrators characterize those relationships?
5. What are the essential components of effective advisory programs?
6. How does an advisory program influence student outcomes and achievement?
7. How can teachers be prepared for serving as advisors?

B. SMALL PERSONALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

1. In what ways do teaching teams facilitate teacher/student interaction?
2. What is an "ideal" learning community size? teacher-to-student ratio?
3. How do colleges or schools prepare teachers to be advocates for children?

C. MENTORING

1. How does teacher-to-student mentoring promote positive student attitudes?
2. Is mentoring more or less effective than other approaches for improving student learning and/or affect?
3. What teacher behaviors and/or practices support mentoring?
4. What is the relationship between teacher mentoring programs, student mentoring, and teacher-to-student mentoring?
5. What are the effects of peer mentoring by students?

D. INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

1. What is a comprehensive social service school?
2. What are the characteristics of successful comprehensive social service schools?
3. How is success measured in comprehensive social service schools?
4. How do different cultural groups view school-based social services?

E. TEACHER SUPPORT FOR STUDENT LEARNING

1. How do teachers successfully promote active student involvement in determining curriculum?
2. What are the characteristics or traits of an effective teacher-facilitator?
3. What is the effect of teacher-facilitated instruction on student learning and affective development?
4. How do teachers empower students to become active learners?

F. A CARING COMMUNITY

1. How do teaching teams create and sustain caring communities?
2. What are the effects of caring communities on student outcomes?
3. What are effective models of caring communities, and what sustains them?

V. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

A. PARENT INVOLVEMENT/PARENT COMMITMENT

1. What is effective parent involvement and what is its effect on student learning?
2. What are effective aspects, characteristics, and components of parent involvement?
3. How is effective parent involvement put into practice? encouraged? nurtured?
4. In what ways does parent involvement enhance positive student attitudes towards school?

B. COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

1. What conditions create successful partnerships?
2. How are effective partnerships sustained?
3. How do successful community/business partnerships affect student achievement?
4. What are effective models of successful business partnerships?

C. SCHOOL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

1. In what ways does service learning contribute to the community?
2. In what ways does service learning contribute to enhanced student achievement and/or attitudes?
3. What are both positive and negative outcomes of service learning/community service?
4. What are the components of a good community service program and what are the effects of those components on students and learning?

D. FAMILY RESOURCE SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

1. How do family resource systems and services impact dropout rates?
2. How do family resource systems and services impact student achievement?
3. How do family resource systems and services impact student behavior?
4. How do family resource systems and services impact student attendance?

VI. A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

A. SHARED DECISION MAKING

1. Does site-based management promote systemic reform in middle level environments?
2. What models of successful site-based management programs can be validated and replicated?
3. What is the impact of site-based management on curriculum?
4. What is the impact of site-based management on student achievement?
5. What is the impact of site-based management on student decision-making in the school?

B. PSYCHOLOGICALLY AND PHYSICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

1. What conditions ensure that students are safe at school?
2. What is the relationship between student safety and learning?
3. What policies promote student health, safety, and well-being?
4. What types of wellness programs contribute to long-term healthy life-styles as students grow to adulthood?
5. What program components are necessary to achieve comprehensive life-style intervention?
6. How can health, wellness, and safety programs be evaluated effectively?

C. LEARNING IS "FUN" (FULFILLING, GRATIFYING, MOTIVATING)

1. In what ways does having "fun" in a school promote creative risk taking?
2. What is the relationship between academic risk-taking and student learning?
3. What are parent perceptions of "fun" in school?
4. What are community perceptions of "fun" in school?
5. What is the role of "play" in curriculum, instruction, learning, and performance assessment?

D. POSITIVE RISK TAKING; WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT CHALLENGES

1. How do schools balance competition and collaboration among small communities of learners?
2. How do schools achieve appropriate competition and collaboration among and between cohorts of students?
3. What are the positive and negative aspects of intramural and inter-

scholastic sports programs?

4. What is the relationship between intramural v. interscholastic sports and: student achievement? attitude? self-worth? other(s)?

E. RESPECT FOR AND ACCEPTANCE OF DIVERSITY

1. How can student activities foster a respect for cultural diversity?
2. What are the characteristics of effective programs that promote respect for cultural diversity?
3. What is the relationship between respect for cultural diversity and student: achievement? attitudes? self-esteem? other(s)?
4. What types of teaching strategies are most effective in promoting multicultural education and tolerance?
5. What are the characteristics of effective multicultural curricula that promote acceptance and understanding of diversity?

F. ORDERLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. How is an "orderly learning environment" defined?
2. What is the relationship between an "orderly learning environment" and student outcomes such as: learning? study-skills? behavior? other(s)?
3. How do teachers-as-facilitators engaging in active student learning and/or authentic instruction maintain orderly learning environments?

G. VIOLENCE AND DRUG FREE SCHOOLS

1. How can curricula help reduce the incidence of violence and drug use among young adolescents?
2. What is the relationship between violence and/or drug use and: student behavior? attendance? achievement? self-esteem? the drop-out rate? other(s)?
3. How are effective intervention strategies put into practice via teaching teams, heterogeneous grouping, integrated curricula, advisory, and other middle school components?

H. INNOVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

1. What learning strategies can be validated as effective approaches for engaging students in active learning?
2. What is the relationship between active student learning experiences and achievement as measured by standardized, norm-referenced tests?
3. What are the causal variables associated with creating middle school components such as: advisory, flexible scheduling, teaching teams, small communities of learners, common planning time, integrated

curriculum, authentic assessment, service learning, cooperative learning, heterogeneous grouping, intramural sports, et cetera?

I. STAFF INTERACTIONS

1. How are faculty acclimated to and involved in teaming functions in a developmentally responsive middle level school?
2. What types of personal and professional interactions create a sense of becoming or belonging among students and faculty?
3. What is the relationship between staff interactions and student achievement?

J. CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CLIMATE

1. What processes and activities promote schools as learning communities?
2. How are new students and faculty acclimated to the school culture?
3. What types of leadership activities promote school culture?

VII. CURRICULUM THAT IS CHALLENGING, INTEGRATIVE AND EXPLORATORY

A. CONNECTING CURRICULUM TO YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

1. What are characteristics of curricula that are: engaging? relevant? challenging? exploratory? integrative?
2. What is the impact of engaging curriculum on student achievement?
3. What is the impact of integrated curriculum on student achievement?
4. What is the impact of relevant curriculum on student achievement?
5. What is the impact of challenging curriculum on student achievement?
6. What is the impact of exploratory curriculum on student achievement?
7. What is the impact of various curricula on teacher practice?
8. How can school-to-work and/or service learning programs enhance student success?

B. INFLUENCE /IMPACT OF CURRICULUM

1. What are the direct and indirect effects of middle school programs, policies, and practice on student achievement?
2. What is the make up of various middle school components such as exploratory classes, advisory, flexible scheduling, teaching teams,

small communities of learners, common planning time, integrated curriculum, integrated instruction, authentic instruction, authentic assessment, cooperative learning, heterogeneous grouping, intramural sports, mastery learning, et cetera?

3. How are the components listed above (VII B. 2.) interconnected to form other constructs and what are the direct, indirect, and interactive relationships of these constructs to student outcomes, including but not limited to achievement?

C. CURRICULUM FOR ALL

1. What types of curricula are most beneficial to students identified as "advanced learners"?
2. What types of curricula are most beneficial to students identified as "at risk"?
3. How are students with special needs included through curricular modifications?
4. What is the impact of various instructional methods such as IEPs, cooperative learning, mastery learning, authentic assessment, et cetera on: classroom environment? behavior? achievement?
5. What instructional approaches work best for the diversity of abilities, aptitudes and talents present in the young adolescent student population?
6. What is the impact of heterogeneous grouping on: classroom environment? behavior? achievement?
7. What pedagogical approaches advance student literacy in language usage? math and science? technology? problem solving? the arts?

D. TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

1. How can technology facilitate teaching and learning strategies?
2. What technology systems are available to assist teachers in assessing student performance?

VIII. VARIED TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES

A. LINKING TEACHING STRATEGIES WITH LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. What resources are being used to support teachers' continual career development?
2. What is the impact of continual teacher professional career development on practice?
3. What teaching practices produce higher levels of success for students?

4. What conditions foster the use of different teaching strategies?
5. What conditions hinder the use of different teaching strategies?
6. What conditions promote teachers' use of potentially successful strategies?

B. CURRENT PRACTICES

1. What are the most common teaching strategies being used?
2. What is the impact on student achievement of cooperative learning, the "dimensions of learning" strategies based on multiple intelligences theory, technological approaches, as well as other ways of teaching?
3. Are there strategies that seem particularly effective with young adolescents? Why do teachers think those strategies are successful and what evidence do educators have that they are?
4. How are teachers adapting pedagogy to meet the needs of diverse learners?

C. OUTCOMES

1. How are various teaching strategies related to student learning? What are the intended and unintended outcomes, and what do teachers think has been taught and what do students think they have learned?
2. How do students integrate what they are learning in various classes?
3. If teachers claim to teach in an interdisciplinary manner, do students understand the relationships between subjects?
4. What are some innovative ways that will enable teachers to learn about students' thinking?

IX. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION THAT PROMOTE LEARNING

A. PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN ASSESSMENT

1. What is the impact of parent involvement in assessment?
2. How do/should schools invite parent involvement in assessment?
3. How do/should schools solicit parent support for: assessment? enhancement of understanding of appropriate assessment and methods? meaningful parent education about assessment?

B. STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN ASSESSMENT

1. What is the impact of self-assessment on: learning? self-esteem?
2. How are self-assessment skills taught?

3. What is the result of students' identifying the methods by which they will be assessed? (rubrics)
4. How do the results of assessment affect student: achievement? behavior? decision-making? attitudes?

C. TEACHER EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT

1. How do teachers provide meaningful information about student progress and/or question purposes of assessment?
2. How should teachers provide meaningful information about student progress?
3. What is the impact of national, state and provincial standards on the accountability movement?
4. What new approaches for assessment have been developed? How effective are they?

X. FLEXIBLE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

A. FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING

1. To what extent do schools use flexible scheduling?
2. What district policies allow or encourage schools to achieve high student outcomes?
3. What factors promote implementation of flexible organizational structures?
4. What are the effects of non-traditional high school schedules on middle school schedules?
5. To what extent does flexible scheduling affect student achievement?
6. What is the impetus for flexible organizational structures?

XI. PROGRAMS AND POLICIES THAT FOSTER HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND SAFETY

A. SCHOOL-BASED EFFORTS

1. What instructional techniques promote health and wellness?
2. What types of policies promote health and wellness?
3. What types of school-wide structures foster comprehensive approaches to health and wellness?

4. What types of policies promote safety?
5. What types of community involvement enhance safety?
6. What are the effects of health, wellness, and safety programs on student life-style behaviors?

B. INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION

1. How effective are existing programs in promoting inter-agency collaboration?
2. What are the advantages/disadvantages of inter-agency collaboration?
3. What are current models of inter-agency collaboration?
4. What are the desired outcomes of inter-agency collaboration?

XII. COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

A. RATIONALE /PURPOSE

1. What does comprehensive guidance encompass?
2. What community support systems should be involved? What should be the nature of that involvement?
3. What steps do schools take to provide for the social, emotional, physical, moral, and cognitive needs of young adolescents?
4. How do educators determine the needs of the student population?
5. Should a guidance system necessarily reflect/respond to community culture and history? If so, how do educators ensure that it does? If not, how do educators rationalize the inconsistency?

B. ROLES

1. What individuals and organizations are responsible for a comprehensive guidance system?
2. What are the roles of community resources in a comprehensive guidance system?
3. What are the roles of the professional school counselor, the classroom teachers, other faculty and administrators, and students in a comprehensive guidance system?
4. What is the role of the professional school counselor in a teacher-based guidance system?

C. COMMUNICATION

1. How is communication facilitated among the collaborators in a comprehensive guidance system?
2. How is a sense of ownership developed and nurtured among collaborators in a comprehensive guidance system?

D. STRUCTURE

1. How do schools structure advisor/advisee programs? How are they scheduled? What is the nature of the teacher/student relationship? Which structures are most effective in promoting student/teacher relationships?
2. What obstacles do various middle schools (urban, rural, suburban) face when implementing a school advisory program? How do the structural components differ within each school?

E. PREPARATION

1. What type of preparation is needed for the school counselors, teachers, and other faculty involved in a teacher-based guidance system?
2. What is the impact of varying levels of professional guidance preparation on student outcomes?

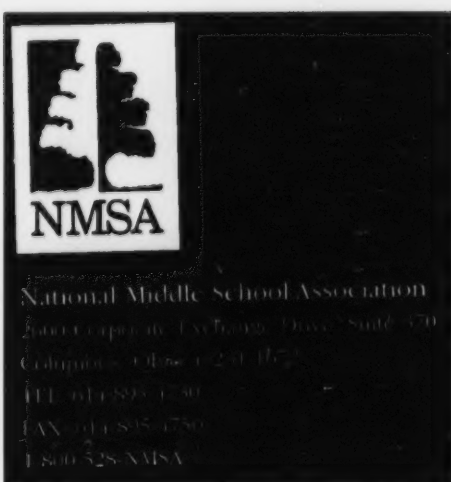
F. CURRICULUM

1. What type of curriculum is most effective in a comprehensive middle school guidance system?
2. How can the school guidance program be integrated into other school curricula?
3. What is the impact of integrating guidance into other school curricula?

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